

Oil and gas stocks slip on lower demand forecast • China housing prices could hit

Market

Are tech stocks rallying now?

Dow Jones Reprints: This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers, use the Order Reprints tool at the bottom of any article or visit www.djreprints.com

See a sample reprint in PDF format.

Order a reprint of this article now

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

WSJ.com

PAGE ONE | MAY 7, 2009

In Hard Times, Rhode Island's Capital Hopes New Slogan Proves Providential

Made in Nashville, Logo Extols City's Creativity; Peoria (Not That One) Tries to Rebrand, Too

By PHILIP SHISHKIN and JENNIFER LEVITZ

PROVIDENCE, R.I. -- A big "P" popped up on posters on busy downtown streets here late last year, and it had nothing to do with parking.

A bright orange P decorates the business card of Mayor David Cicilline. He is the man who decided that Providence, previously touted as "Renaissance City" but suffering a jobless rate of 11.4%, needed a new image. After a \$100,000 rebranding campaign led by a Nashville, Tenn., marketing firm, Providence proclaimed itself the "Creative Capital," with a stylized P as a logo.

"They had to go to Nashville to let them tell us that we are creative," complains Vincent "Buddy" Cianci, the former Providence mayor and radio-show host. He calls the new campaign a waste of money. Mr. Cianci says he didn't pay anyone a penny for the "Renaissance City" tag he gave Providence before he had to go to federal prison for 4½ years on a racketeering conspiracy charge.

As recession wallops cities and towns across the country, many are paying for image of attracting tourists and business investment. Some people think the money would be better spent on something else. Others think the logos and catchphrases their cities are adopting are a waste of point. Controversy has led some officials to change their branding plans.

North Star Destination Strategies, the Nashville company that handled the Providence rebranding work for about 100 cities, towns and other destinations. In the first quarter of this year, it received new requests from communities, up from 12 in the same period last year. "It's busier than ever," says Chief Executive Don McEachern.

This isn't the first time communities have rebranded during hard times. Mira Engler, an Iowa State University professor who has studied community development, says a 1980s recession inspired a number of Midwestern places to repackaging themselves as frontier towns or enclaves with Dutch or Norwegian themes.

In 1939, three depressed counties in central Massachusetts were dubbed the "Pioneer Valley" by a group of

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
Digital Network

You have been randomly selected to participate in a brief online survey. Your answers will strictly be used for research purposes.

Thanks!

[Respondent Privacy Statement](#)

businessmen looking to drum up tourism. Today, a new group of boosters is pushing to rebrand the area "The Valley of the Dinosaurs," to capitalize on all the prehistoric footprints that have been found in the area.

Facing a 20% drop in downtown business, New Market, Va., decided to tap into its Civil War past, via a slogan contest. The town promised to pay the winner's water bill for a month. The winning entry: "Where History and Hospitality Meet."

It turned out that Harrisonburg, Va., just 18 miles south, was already using the same phrase as its tourist slogan. "I'm not sure how they picked up on it," says New Market Mayor Larry Smith. An Internet search finds the phrase used by various people in various places with things to promote. The town shifted gears and went with a runner-up: "The Crossroads of History, Heritage and Community."

Peoria, Ariz., paid North Star about \$80,000 to come up with a campaign that included this slogan: "Peoria. Naturally Connected." Local wags offered free alternatives on a Web site, including "Peoria. Not the One in Illinois." And: "Peoria. Looks Better in the Rearview Mirror."

Peoria Mayor Bob Barrett says, "Some of them are very funny, I hate to admit it." It didn't help matters that "Naturally Connected" was already being used by Victoria County in Canada. So Peoria shelved the logo and the slogan.

North Star says most of its projects have been successful. The company says it conducts extensive research, including polling and focus groups to find a client's brand identity. It recently worked with Hibbing, Minn., the birthplace of Bob Dylan, on the "We're More Than Ore" campaign aimed at broadening the city's iron-mining image.

In Wisconsin, many citizens have been slamming the new state motto "Live Like You Mean It," which was previously used to promote liquor, energy bars and diet books. Republicans crafted a parody campaign called "Tax Like You Mean It," a jab at the governor's proposed budget. The state has applied for a trademark for the motto. But Ellyn Elson a Napa, Calif., dietitian and co-author of a 2006 book on living a life of significance titled "Live Like You Mean It," says she came up with the name first.

Wisconsin officials defend the new motto and say the \$50,000 paid to a Milwaukee ad agency, Red Brown Klé, was money well spent. The ad agency referred calls to the state. "When the going gets tough, the tough get marketing," says Kelli Trumble, the state's tourism secretary.

Providence, which used to call itself the "Beehive of Industry," has long had issues with its economy and identity. The decline of manufacturing in the 1920s and '30s hit the beehive hard, for decades. Urban blight was so bad that when Mr. Cianci was first elected mayor in 1974, "you could throw a bowling ball down the center of the main street and you wouldn't hit anybody," he says.

On his watch, Providence uncovered a paved-over river, and put gondolas on the water. The rambunctious mayor seldom made a speech without touting the Renaissance City, he says.

Providence's brand took a big hit in 2002 with Mr. Cianci's corruption conviction. "I surrounded myself with some people I shouldn't have," says Mr. Cianci, over Marlboros and red wine in a bar called Tammany Hall.

Mr. Cicilline, elected mayor after Mr. Cianci's conviction, wanted to turn over a new leaf. And that included

finding a new brand identity to replace the Renaissance City, which aides say had outlived its usefulness and wasn't all that original in the first place. "We have a great product," Mr. Cicilline says of Providence. "We needed a better capacity to market it."

The new name was meant to evoke entrepreneurship, as well as the growing number of artists, some of whom squatted in abandoned textile mills before getting kicked out by developers. As real-estate prices rose, some of the artists decamped to nearby Pawtucket.

With unemployment and foreclosures soaring, the \$100,000 the city spent on the branding campaign raised eyebrows. "It's hard to imagine spending that much money when you think about what it could do for a family," says Sara Mersha, a community organizer who works with people losing their homes.

Mr. Cicilline says the Creative Capital campaign will stimulate the local economy. "I don't think there's any question that it has already helped us, and will really strengthen our position as the recession ends," he says. The city says the arts and culture industry generates \$112 million in economic activity and creates jobs.

Just down the highway in Pawtucket, which started calling itself "Rhode Island's Creative Community" at least a year before Providence settled on the Creative Capital moniker, officials say there's enough creativity for everyone. "We took no offense," says Herbert Weiss, Pawtucket economic and cultural-affairs officer.

Write to Philip Shishkin at philip.shishkin@wsj.com and Jennifer Levitz at jennifer.levitz@wsj.com

Printed in The Wall Street Journal, page A1

Copyright 2009 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. Distribution and use of this material are governed by our Subscriber Agreement and copyright law. For non-personal use or to order multiple copies, please contact Dow Jones Reprints at 1-800-843-0008 or visit www.djreprints.com